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ABSTRACT

Directed at home school teachers, this paper criticizes public schools for not embracing technology and suggests that much of the current educational software is inadequate. The paper notes that home schooling families are creating a revolution in the educational software marketplace, because home school teachers are looking for the best tools available. The paper suggests that the computer can automate the drudge work such as developing lesson plans, record keeping, and generating drills and spelling lists, but it can go beyond these mundane uses to help children learn French, piano, typing, publishing, and more. (Author/LPP)

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High-Tech Home Schooling

Scott W. Somerville ■

Abstract

Directed at home school teachers, this paper criticizes public schools for not embracing technology and suggests that much of the current educational software is inadequate. The paper notes that home schoolers are creating a revolution in the educational software marketplace, because home school teachers are looking for the best tools they can get. The computer can automate the drudge work such as developing lesson plans, record keeping, and generating drills and spelling lists, but it can go beyond these mundane uses to help children learn French, piano, typing, publishing, and more. With Internet access, computers open whole new worlds for home-schooled children.

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By the time your grandchildren are ready for school, home schooling energy plus computer power should have changed the face of education forever. Teachers' unions and school bureaucracies have managed to keep the information revolution out of the public schools for a generation, but those days are numbered. The revolution is happening today, and you should join it.

But first, a word of caution. Much of the educational software that exists today is a joke. The reason for this is simple. Job-protecting teachers and risk-averse bureaucrats have refused to buy the kind of software that can do any serious teaching. Software manufacturers, realizing that they cannot crack the education market, develop "educational software," which is really just video games. Calling this software "educational" is like adding vitamins to potato chips and calling it health food. It's reprehensible, but it isn't stupid—software manufacturers know that parents will buy software if they think it's good for their kids, while many teachers won't buy software if they think it might threaten their jobs.

Home schoolers are creating a revolution in this marketplace, because home school teachers are looking for the best tools they can get. Let's face it, one thing home schoolers have enough of is job security. We could use some labor-saving devices, and the computer is truly that. IBM used to have a slogan that went, "computers should work, people should think." Nowhere is this truer than in home schooling. How many hours do you spend checking math answers? Why are you doing this, when a computer could do it for you? And how about flash cards? Ninety-five percent of the flash card work you are doing (or aren't doing because you find it so boring) could be done by your computer.

By the time your grandchildren start school, the tedious part of your life as a home schooler should be fully automated. Lesson plans, record keeping, drills, spelling lists—all this you shouldn't have to do! Some of this software already exists or is being developed right now for the home school market. Unfortunately, it is still a jungle out there, so keep your eyes on magazines like *Practical Home Schooling* to help you separate the wheat from the chaff.

But the computer can do more than just automate the drudge work. It can also boldly take you where no mom has gone before. Ten years ago you would have been hard put to find a housewife who could layout and edit a professional looking newsletter or magazine. Now, thanks to desktop publishing software, it seems like everyone's a publisher. Nowadays, the computer does all the hard part of the job, and you get to do the fun stuff. The same holds true in many other fields. Twelve years ago, I was a young computer programmer who had never seen a metal-working machine. Then I was given

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the job of programming a very sophisticated computer to cut molds out of aluminum. Within 4 months, I was machining complex molds—but only because the software did all the hard work for me. Computers should work; people should think. It really can happen.

With the very sophisticated software that is now available, your child can learn French, piano, typing, publishing, and much, much more. Plug a telephone line into your computer, and open whole new worlds. My grandfather-in-law is a retired Air Force scientist. He spends all his free time in Florida talking with his buddies on CompuServe. My children can have a science tutor online anytime they want one. How many other retired teachers, scientists, or pastors are out there longing for a way to share their knowledge and wisdom with a new generation?

Let's face it. Most real people are scared of computers. But you as a home school teacher have a reason to overcome your fear. This machine can make your job easier and help you do it better. By contrast, the public school teacher down the street is terrified of the computer, too. Not only does she not understand it, but it could cost her her job. She knows that if the information revolution ever reaches education, she'll be flipping burgers at Wendy's.

The revolution is now. Join it!

Resource List

Pride, Bill, & Pride, Mary. (1992). *Pride's guide to educational software.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Practical Home Schooling. Fenton, MO: Home Life.

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